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# Towing fees melt away at Caserta's

State Treasurer Frank T. Caprio says he's glad to help motorists stranded in the Dec. 13 snowstorm by paying off their towing charges, spending about \$30,000.

**BY BRUCE LANDIS**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — State Treasurer Frank T. Caprio said yesterday that he has given thousands of dollars of his own money to help people whose cars were tagged and towed during the hours-long traffic jams during the Dec. 13 snowstorm.

Caprio's father, Providence Municipal Court Judge Frank Caprio, meanwhile, said he'll tell his clerks to dismiss the Providence tickets of those towed because of the storm.

In a combination of good deeds and public relations, Treasurer Caprio said he wrote about 70 checks of up to \$100 yesterday to people who lined up at Caserta Pizzeria, in his Federal Hill neighborhood, to present their tickets and towing bills from the storm. Afterward, he said he had spent "close to \$30,000" in all, having also gone to towing yards to help people get their cars back.

He said that an estimated 300 people in total might have been towed in the storm.

The people who showed up yes-

terday were grateful and surprised at a rare, perhaps unprecedented, piece of generosity.

"This is something," said Arlene Walker, of Pawtucket, who works in health services in Warwick. She said she got a \$100 ticket when her car was towed in Providence. "No one else offered to help anybody."

"This is fabulous," said Carey Pearson, who ran out of gas after being stuck for hours on Route 95. "I could see my exit," he said, but "there was no way to get off the highway and get gas." The result was a \$99.50 towing bill.

Caprio said he was helping people pay their tickets and tow bills out of common decency.

"These people were playing by

the rules," he said. "They were trying to get home safely" when they got stuck on the road. Their cars were towed, and they were socked with fines of up to \$100 plus towing fees of more than \$100, which some of them said they couldn't afford. Some had to borrow money to pay, all the while running up \$24-per-day storage charges at the tow yards.

At least part of the problem, officials have tacitly said or explicitly stated during the anger after the storm, was widespread government disorganization contributing to a less-than-terrific plowing job. Some people reported spend-

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Tabatha Buren-Vidal, 6, front, waits on line yesterday with her mom, Marta, and sister Juliani, 10, to receive a check from state Treasurer Frank Caprio to pay for a towing charge.

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# Checks

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ing five or six hours getting home or to work, and some Providence students were stranded on school buses until late at night.

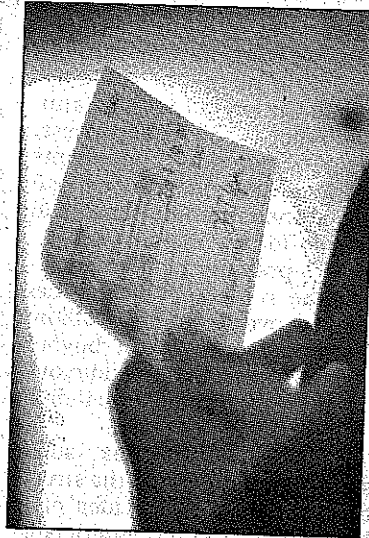
Between 10 a.m. and about noon yesterday, Caprio sat at a table writing checks to people, many with already-difficult lives that had been made suddenly worse through no fault of their own.

"As long as they were towed that night, they qualify," he said.

Caprio said he got the idea from a businessman who told him that an employee "had to borrow money from her sister to pay the tow bill." The businessman wondered whether the government was helping people in that situation. Caprio didn't know of any such thing and decided to reimburse the woman himself.

Then he put out notices, including a sign at the Providence police headquarters, where some people had to walk to learn where their cars had been towed, offering help and asking them to contact him by e-mail.

The resulting event at Caserta's ran smoothly, staffed by several people from Caprio's office (working as volunteers, spokesman Peter Kerwin said) and from his campaign organization. At a reception table, one woman kept track of the tow bills and tickets while another recorded who the beneficiaries



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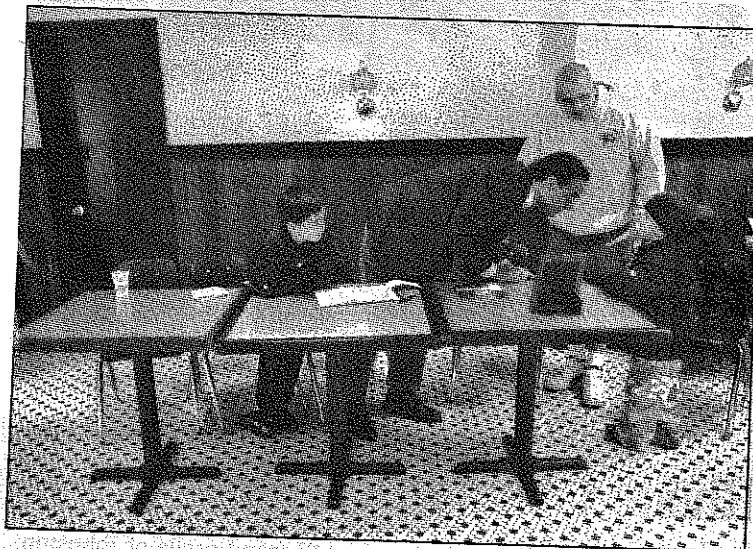
**Arlene Walker, of Pawtucket, holds the \$100 check she received from state Treasurer Frank Caprio to pay for the towing fee Walker was charged during the storm.**

were in a computer database. A relative videotaped the event, saying the material might find its way onto the Internet. Several kinds of pizza were available.

Caprio, a former state senator, is considered a probable candidate for governor in three years. He was noncommittal about that yesterday, saying, "I don't know what the future will hold."

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**With his own son, Frank, 10, at his side, state Treasurer Frank Caprio greets Ori Sanborn, 5, of West Warwick, as Ori's father, Gary, looks on. The Sanborns had come to Caserta's to receive compensation for a towing fee, but Gary Sanborn says that when he found out the money was coming directly out of the treasurer's pocket he felt he couldn't accept it.**